

ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT ON AGING SOLUTIONS EVENT

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Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library

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TESTIMONY PROVIDED BY

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I am Deborah Kuiken, Executive Director of Midland Area Agency on Aging in Centralia, Illinois. I thank the Department on Aging for hosting this solutions forum to the White House Conference on Aging.

I bring to you today a synopsis of the results of a Mini White House Conference on Aging Solutions Event held in our area on March 21 and 22 of this year. The 47 participants in the event respectfully request that the recommendations resulting from their efforts will be given to the Illinois Delegation to the White House Conference on Aging and incorporated into strategies the delegation develop to further the solutions recommended from Illinois.

Three major issues were reviewed, discussed and debated followed by balloting on the issues and the solutions presented. The issues were prioritized by the group in the following order:

1. Reauthorization of the Older Americans Act
2. Economic Security including Social Security and Health Care
3. Housing along the Lifespan

First, discussion regarding the Reauthorization of the Older Americans act focused on the need for additional funding. More services are needed and as the baby boomers come of age and are caregivers, they realize that there is insufficient services available. The three sub issues that emerged were the current services available under the Act, the National Family Caregiver Program, and Mental Health and Aging.

The need for additional funding for the following services in order or priority were identified:

1. Rural transportation
2. Home delivered meals
3. Case management
4. Chore/homemaker especially for one time deep cleaning and
5. Mental health services for older adults.

It was also suggested that a new title of subsection under Title III be added specifically to address the mental health needs of older adults including funding for systems integration, direct

service counseling, peer support groups, outreach and public education.

Caregiver solutions identified in priority order were:

1. The GRG program should be available to all regardless of the age of the grandparent
2. Case management services should be available and allowed
3. Increased funding to allow for more respite care for both GRG and Caregivers of older adults
4. Provide financial assistance to Care givers who are providing end of life care and

must

take temporary leaves of absences from gainful employment.

Priority Issue #2 was Economic Security.

Two issues emerged from the discussion of this topic. The first being Social Security and the second, health care. Both were viewed as critical to the economic security of older individuals and for all generations. There was generally a belief that the Social Security Trust Fund was being misused for purposes other than the payment of benefits.

Health care costs including insurance premiums for all Americans was of particular concern. The cost of health care has risen so much faster than the rate of inflation. Out of pocket expenses continue to rise at alarming rates when compared to income not only for Social Security beneficiaries, but for other pensioners and the general workforce. Private corporations who promised health care coverage to retirees are now requiring them to cost share or are eliminating coverage altogether in order to try and stay competitive in the world marketplace.

The following solutions were identified in priority order:

1. All employed persons should pay into Social Security
2. Eliminate the government's access to the Trust Fund
3. Raise or eliminate the cap on Social Security payroll tax
4. Federal government must repay all monies borrowed from the Trust Fund
5. Convene a group of non-partisan professionals to study options and provide unbiased recommendations for a long term solution
6. Income tax received which is derived from Social Security benefits should be directed

to the Trust Fund

7. Allow workers the choice to invest or not invest a portion of the Social Security payroll tax into private accounts

Health Care Solutions in priority order were:

1. Vigorously investigate and prosecute Medicare/Medicaid fraud and return funds recovered to those funds. More investigators are needed.
2. Increase the pharmaceutical subsidy for senior citizens
3. Medicare and Medicaid should allow payment for more preventative medical costs
4. Eliminate advertising on television by pharmaceutical companies as it increases the cost passed on to the consumer and medication decisions should be between the physician and the patient.
5. Increase the supply of physicians by allowing all qualified individuals seeking admission to enter medical school
6. Medical malpractice claims should first be reviewed by an arbitration board similar to a grand jury.
7. Medical malpractice insurance companies must not be allowed to settle a claim without the permission/agreement of the physician or health care facility being sued.
8. Persons wanting to file a medical malpractice suit must be willing to pay their own attorney fees and related costs before a lawsuit is filed regardless of the outcome.

The third priority issue was Housing. Due to time constraints for testimony, we are submitting the synopsis as an attachment to this testimony.

Thank you again for sponsoring this solutions event. The people of planning and service area nine appreciate the opportunity to present their issues and recommendations